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ABSTRACT

The Brody Reading Method integrates four components to teach reading and written-language skills to elementary and secondary school students with reading difficulties. The program begins with syllabication for decoding, and then reinforces and expands those skills by providing structured application in content area reading, spelling, and composition. This approach incorporates both word analysis and whole-language techniques. In the elementary grades, the method is used to build a developmental reading foundation which can prevent the initiation of a failure cycle. The method can also be used for middle and upper grade students as a remedial tool to break the total academic failure syndrome initiated by deficient reading skills. Several studies suggest that teachers are successfully using the Brody Reading Method for at-risk students in the second through twelfth grades in reading, resource room, learning disabled, and special education settings. (CB)

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The Brody Reading Method: A Successful Approach to Reading and Written-Language Skills for At Risk Students

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Abstract

The Brody Reading Method provides a flexible tool for teachers and students to make positive strides in decoding, comprehension, writing, and spelling. The approach incorporates both word-analysis and whole-language techniques. Recognizing that many students can orally comprehend much more than they can read, the method begins with a streamlined presentation of syllable patterns, then applies the patterns to content reading. Teachers are using The Brody Reading Method successfully for at-risk students grades two through twelve in reading, resource, learning disabilities, and special education settings. The method is also providing developmental success to regular grade three reading classes, and low reading groups grades four through eight where it is used in conjunction with a basal reader.

The Brody Reading Method: A Successful Approach to Reading and Written-Language Skills for At Risk Students

Many students are at risk because they cannot complete reading assignments required for academic participation and success. The Reading Report Card (cited in What Works, 1986) found that:

* 6% of 9-year-olds in 1984 could not follow brief written directions.
* 40% of 13-year-olds and 16% of 17-year-olds attending high school have not acquired intermediate reading skills.
* They are unable to search for specific information, interrelate ideas or make generalizations about literature, science, and social studies materials.

The drop in poor readers from 40% of 13-year-olds to 16% of 17-year-olds in high school does not reflect a gain in reading skills during high school, but the reality that students who cannot read, often drop out. In dropping out they leave behind the opportunity to gain important skills for successful careers, adulthood, parenthood, and citizenship. As discussed in Illiterate America (Kozol, 1985), millions of Americans cannot read well enough to fill out job applications or to read menus, let alone to do the reading requisite for staying in school to complete their educations. Students at risk need a program which delivers immediate and noticeable success with reading and writing skills.

A practitioner in the field has developed such a program in response to the needs of poor readers. The Brody Reading Method, a

patterned approach to reading and written langauage skills, has proved to be effective with students in both urban and rural areas. New Hampshire teachers in the cities of Concord and Nashua, and in towns such as Jaffrey, Weare, Amherst, and Peterborough are implementing the program with their poor readers in two distinct settings. In middle and upper grades, it is providing a remedial tool which is breaking the total academic failure syndrome initiated by deficient reading skills. In the elementary grades, it is building a developmental reading foundation which can prevent the initiation of a failure cycle.

Need for the Method

The method recognizes that, as Chall (1983, p. 118) points out, some students have oral language word recognition and comprehension skills which greatly surpass their reading and writing skills. Some students converse well and clearly comprehend spoken information, but would not be able to read and comprehend a script of their own conversations. Such students continually fail at reading because they are not guided by reliable steps which are small enough to produce success.

Some methods and materials are already in place for implementing many of the crucial and logical steps for the process of learning to read.

* Phonics teaches letter sounds with programs such as the Lippincott Basal (Walcutt & McCracken, 1981) and the Gillingham Method (Gillingham & Stillman, 1968).

* Linguistics teaches students to group three or four letters to read one syllable words with programs such as SRA (Rasmussen & Goldberg, 1976) and Let's Read (Bloomfield & Barnhart, 1961).

* Next, students attempt content reading using context clues. They endeavor to read longer words in passages by deriving the pronunciation and meaning of the words from context.

For some students, the above steps work well. Others break down when attempting to advance from reading short words to reading longer words in context. The students do not have the necessary generalization skills to make that leap. The Brody Reading Method provides an intermediate step to help students grow from reading one-syllable words to reading multisyllabic words in context. The method teaches that all words are made of syllables. Small words have one syllable; longer words have several syllables. Reading syllables is similar to reading small words such as those in word families and linguistic readers. Larger words are really just several smaller words (or syllables) strung together. Looking at longer words as groups of syllables rather than a long string of letters simplifies the decoding process. Most words in English have syllables that follow one of six patterns. Students can learn to decode most English words by learning the six patterns and how to apply them to words.

Currently, some impetus for reading improvement is lost through divisiveness among both researchers and practitioners in the field. Educators become caught in the debate of word-attack versus

whole-language approaches to reading. Each school can cite numerous studies to support its approach. Campbell & Stanley (1963, p. 3) point out that:

> we should not expect that 'crucial experiments' which pit opposing theories will be likely to have clear-cut outcomes. When one finds...that competent observers advocate strongly divergent points of view, it seems likely...that both have observed something valid... The stronger the controversy, the more likely this is.

For some students no amount of immersion in language will cause them to master the word recognition aspects of reading. Conversely some word-callers with perfect word-attack skills have no sense of the meaning of what they read. The Brody Reading Method recognizes the value of both approaches and incorporates word-attack and whole-language strategies.

The Brody Reading Method

The Brody Reading Method integrates four components to teach reading and written-language skills. The program begins with syllabication for decoding, then reinforces and expands those skills by providing structured application in the areas of content reading, spelling, and composition.

Decoding

Initally, The Brody Reading Method focuses on providing a simple syllabication tool. It allows students to break the code and pronounce most words they meet in print. Patterning: Reading

Becomes Easy (Brody, 1984) provides material for the first part of the program. Its syllabication lists teach the six syllable patterns which occur with great regularity in English words. The method presents multisyllabic words in two sections.

Section I teaches the following six syllable patterns, one at a time, and in combination, on controlled lists.

VC - a single vowel (short) followed by a consonant, as in cat or is.

VR - a single vowel followed by the consonant r, as in car or her.

V - a single vowel (long) ending a syllable, as in me or go.

VV - two adjacent vowels giving one vowel sound, as in boat or seen.

VCe - a single vowel (long) followed by a consonant and silent e, as in like or fame.

CLe - a consonant followed by the letter l and silent e, as in apple or uncle.

Section II teaches exceptions after the fundamental lessons are well established. Exceptions include:

* Diphthong,
* Schwa,
* Common affixes such as tion or ible,
* Variation such as soft and hard c and g.

Work with the Brody Reading Method can begin when the sounds of

the alphabet have been mastered: consonants, consonant blends, long and short vowel sounds, and vowel combinations. It fits in well after a linguistic program or when students are able to read three letter words.

Teachers find the syllabication approach in Patterning: Reading Becomes Easy (Brody, 1984) a simple program to implement. Students learn the six patterns by applying them to words. They are not required to memorize rules which they can rarely remember or apply.

Comprehension

The Brody Reading Method helps students develop reading comprehension skills both indirectly and directly. When students learn to decode or decipher print with the syllabication tool, their reading comprehension improves. They can understand what the words convey because they now know what the words are.

While some students entering the program have difficulty decoding, others can word call fluently when asked to read aloud, but have no memory or understanding of what they have read. The students must learn to relate the material to their own experiences, or to rethink the material with their own vocabularies and language structures. To guarantee student learning and retention of material, it is essential that the students not only read the material, but that they also restate or rethink the material with their own words and language structures. They may use new vocabulary, but the vocabulary needs to be understood in terms of language or experience the students already possess.

Patterning: Companion Passages (Brody, 1986) provides a model for teachers to use when helping students to improve reading comprehension. The passages reinforce the decoding and vocabulary skills learned on syllabication lists and go further to develop skill in reading, researching, remembering, summarizing, and presenting information which is read.

Students learn to question themselves and summarize the information they are reading in small segments, paragraph by paragraph as they read. They are always encouraged to look back (research) in the text if they need reminders to tell what they have read. When they have finished reading a passage, they are presented with a main idea and asked to state specific facts from the passage in their own words, to support or illustrate the idea.

Writing

The Brody Reading Method also encourages the integration of writing assignments with reading. Students who have never read are likely to be poor writers. They have no understanding of how sentences, paragraphs, or essays should sound or appear. By gaining decoding skills and applying them to content reading, the students take a first step toward clear writing -- seeing a good model. The Brody Method first lets students hear and write dictated sentences. Teachers give dictation slowly, repeating syllables which students have difficulty spelling, and stressing sounds of letters until students can insert or correct them. Such dictation develops a sense of the relationship between the sound and appearance of a

complete sentence. Students are also encouraged to construct complete oral sentences when conveying information they have gleaned from the readings. Later the students learn to write complete sentences which sequentially present highlights from passages they have read.

Students practice using a simple outline to jot down the main idea, details, and conclusion on topics from their readings. They learn to turn each item of the outline into separate complete sentences which finally provide a well structured paragraph. Upon mastering the format, students possess a tool for constructing single and multiparagraph essays. Students can apply the format in situations such as answering essay tests, writing business letters, preparing book reports, and composing chapter summaries.

Spelling

Just as it is difficult to write well without first seeing a model, it is also difficult to spell without a model. The Brody Reading Method helps students make steady gains in their spelling skills through use of the syllabication tool. Students write words in syllables five-times-each several different times during the week. They always write the words in syllables, subvocalizing each syllable as it is written. Syllables tend to have a small number of letters in them. Students have fewer symbols to keep in sequence when learning to spell one syllable at a time. Many syllables appear repeatedly in a variety of words. Students gain practice in noticing and spelling frequently occurring syllables in the course

of their spelling work.

Spelling, decoding, comprehension, and writing work together within the program to stimulate and reinforce reading and written languague growth.

Outcomes

Although the English language has variations and exceptions in its letter sound associations, the syllabication tool linked with content reading application is making survival reading a reality for many at-risk students.

Fifteen learning disabled students, who entered ninth grade with reading and writing skills below a fifth grade level, were taught with the Brody Reading Method. Of the 15 students, 12 learned to read and write well enough to participate in regular curriculum basic level classes. Those 12 earned high school diplomas.

Twenty-two students scattered in grades 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9, whom teachers chose to use the program because of poor reading skills, were pre-posttested with the Slosson Oral Reading Test. Both the average gain and the median gain were 1.8 years within one school year. The least gain was .7 and the greatest was 3.1.

Forty students scattered in grades 2, 5, 6, and 9, whose teachers also chose to use the program because of poor reading skills (some of whom were in the group tested with the Slosson), were tested with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test with Vocabulary and Comprehension subtests. The average gain was 1.5 years

and the median gain was 1.7 years within one school year. The least gain was - 1 and the greatest was 4.8 years. The testing was done in the field, in public schools with public school students and teachers.

Many other students who are using the program successfully were not tested. Reasons vary. Some teachers were not allowed to test their students, some could not find time, others wanted to try the program but did not want their students to take any more tests. Those teachers, special education and reading specialists, parents, and students using the program in more than 30 schools continually report successes. The story below illustrates their excitement.

One resource room teacher in Merrimack, NH wrote about an eleventh grader who spent most of his time sleeping through class. The boy had been dumped with her because he refused to read aloud for his reading teacher, and did no work in other classes. She asked him to spend ten minutes with her on Patterning to prove it would not work. Twenty-five minutes later she had to tell the boy to stop working because the bell rang for class change. The next day when the teacher came to class she found the boy at her desk with the book open ready to work. A few weeks later, the resource teacher was busy with other students when someone working alone could not decode a word. The young man who had been learning the syllable patterns gave assistance and suggested to the teacher that she ought to teach the other student the patterns. Later in the year, the young man read chapters of a novel aloud to his English class.

What Makes the Program Work?

Approach and Need Well Matched

Some poor readers, including many with learning disabilities, require great concentration when discriminating letter shapes, when linking the shapes with sounds, and when keeping the shapes and sounds in sequence. These readers have difficulty simply seeing and retaining the rows of letters that form words. They are completely absorbed in this task alone and cannot take a broader view, or generalize, to notice word and syllable patterns.

Directly teaching syllable and word patterns makes students conscious of the simple groupings that take place, with great regularity, within words. The patterns then provide a structure for quickly identifying the sound behavior of particular letter sequences. When readers grasp the sounds quickly, the effort of sequencing is not required for as great a length of time, and more effective reading can occur (Brody, 1984).

Studies done by Zenhausern (1983) also point to possible explanations for the success of the Brody Reading Method. According to his studies, 85% of learning disabled students have difficulty making a grapheme to phoneme connection. They have difficulty processing graphemes or print symbols into phonemes or sound. The method gives students a tool for recognizing letters as groups or syllables with a particular vowel sound. Students do not need to "hear" words in their minds before pronouncing them. They orally

sound out syllables and when they have externally heard what they have said, match the sounds to their oral vocabularies to identify words.

Effective Teaching Practices Match

Several factors which have emerged from the school effectiveness literature contribute to student success with the Brody Reading Method.

According to Latham (1985), students learn best when responding with nearly 100% accuracy to stimuli presented every three seconds. Patterning: Reading Becomes Easy (Brody, 1984) presents students with stimuli at least every three seconds. It asks them to recognize syllable divisions, identify syllable pattern, tell the vowel sound as identified by the pattern (i.e. VC pattern always has a short vowel sound), pronounce the syllables, pronounce the word, then tell the word meaning, or use it in a sentence. Students respond to the stimuli with nearly 100% accuracy because they are taught one pattern at a time. No exceptions are introduced until students have a firm and secure footing in the six patterns.

Other studies suggest that students learn best with intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards (R & D Interpretation Service Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., 1986). With the Brody Reading Method, students begin successful reading in Lesson One. Their reward is independent reading success rather than external praise. In a world where students have continually suffered failure for not reading, the intrinsic reward of independent, successful reading is very powerful.

Further Information

The Brody Reading Method provides a flexible tool for teachers and students to make positive strides in decoding, comprehension, writing, and spelling. For further information about the program or to order materials, contact THE STUDY SKILLS NETWORK, P.O. Box 801, Milford, NH 03055, or call 603-673-8461.

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